

# Stars slowly starting to shine

**SHANE JONES**

*News Staff*

The Stars are starting to show some glimmers.

The Sherwood Park Northstars bantam football team has struggled out of the gate with all but six rookie players at the level this season, and while things didn't seem all that much better on paper in their recent 41-27 loss to the Edmonton Seahawks Blue, enough was better than their opening defeats by scores of 48-12 and 50-14 to declare progress is definitely being made.

The Northstars actually could have put the Seahawks in a deep hole with a strong opening quarter.

After speedster Daniel Marshall scored on a long reverse play, the Northstars looked to have gone ahead by a pair of majors before a holding penalty brought the second one back, keeping the score 7-0 Stars after the first.

"We could have been up 14-0 right off the bat," said Northstars head coach Rob MacKenzie. "We basically had the ball for the first 10 minutes of the game."

On the first play of the second quarter, the Seahawks pulled to within one, scoring on a third-down gamble from seven yards out before missing the two-point convert attempt.

The Stars once again looked to have scored a massive TD on a 63-yard run into the end zone by Marshall but had another big scoring play erased, this time due to an illegal block.

That call proved pretty costly, as with seven minutes left, the Seahawks drove down and scored to take a 13-7 lead.

The Seahawks defence then quickly picked off Stars QB Colton Henderson and returned the ball 50 yards for a 20-7 advantage.

The Park pivot atoned for the gaffe before the half, however, taking a QB keeper 47 yards to score on a great individual effort



*Shane Jones / News Staff*

**Sherwood Park Northstars running back Daniel Marshall gets taken down versus the Seahawks.**

to fight his way through a number of tacklers on his way to the goal-line to make it 20-13 at the midmark.

The Seahawks and their massive running back were able to take advantage of some trouble with tackling in the second half and scored three consecutive touchdowns to go

ahead 41-13 early in the fourth.

But the Stars kept fighting and would get a pair of majors to close out the game as Henderson hit receiver Michael Dominiuk for a 54-yard gain that turned into a short-yardage TD by Alex Irving. And Marshall scored his second of what could have been four in the contest on a 49-yard run in the final minute.

When it was all added up, MacKenzie said the difference came down to mistakes.

"We shot ourselves in the foot too many times again," he said. "We had two touchdowns called back on penalties. They had a huge running back that was just carrying our guys on his back too. We really took some bad, poor penalties in this game. It's a matter of better understanding the game. To know what holding is and when you are going to get called for it. Some of kids are still working on getting familiar with all of the rules and how the game is called at this level. We have a number of kids that haven't played before."

Despite the troubling number of miscues, MacKenzie feels some pieces are starting to come together that will well serve the future of this team.

"There were a lot of positives to take away from this game and to look at going forward," he said. "Daniel Marshall is so quick and is doing a lot of good things out there and our other two running backs are fine, they just need a little experience. Our offensive line, it always takes a bit longer at that position, but they are all coming back next year. The more they play this year the better they are going to be next year. When you look at how many kids are going to be back on offence and defence, there are a lot of positives for the future."

Perhaps most important is that the players themselves seem as positive as ever, despite the 0-3 start to the season.

"We feel we are starting to get better," Marshall said. "The team's playing fairly

well right now compared to where we started. We've been working hard at it in our practices. We still need to work on our conditioning a little bit but overall we are playing fairly well. And we're still having fun, which is important too.

MacKenzie envisions the games becoming a lot more fun and competitive down the line as he feels his team will find their footing against some weaker upcoming opposition

"It's still a work in progress," he said. "We'll see where we are at the end of the year. It's not going to get much harder. We had some tough teams to start and a lot of easier opponents coming up. We have had three strong opponents and I still think we could be in the hunt for fourth."

The Northstars should also be buoyed by the expected return from injury of quarterback Shaun O'Neill in the next two weeks.

The Capital District Minor Football Association gave all of its teams the Labour Day weekend off as they readjust the tiering and work out the remainder of the seasonal schedule.

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